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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001610

SIPDIS

FOR STATE SA/INS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: LTTE CLOSES POLITICAL OFFICES IN  
GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED AREAS AFTER REFUSING AIRPORT AS CFA  
TALKS VENUE

REF: A. COLOMBO 1224

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 1448

[1](#)C. COLOMBO 1493

Classified By: DCM James F. Entwistle. Reason 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On September 8, Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) political leader Thamilselvan announced the LTTE would close all remaining political offices in government-controlled areas in the wake of the LTTE refusal to hold Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) talks at Colombo airport. The LTTE statement implied that news reports about a months-old meeting between the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) and the breakaway Karuna faction added to the Tiger's feeling of unease. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Norwegian facilitators had sought to break a deadlock over the venue for CFA talks between the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) and the LTTE (Reftel C) by proposing on September 7 Katunayake International Airport (KIA) as a suitable site. Turning LTTE arguments that the GSL inability to guarantee the Tiger's physical security necessitated a foreign venue; the Norwegians noted that any foreign capital would require several hours transiting through KIA, which, if deemed safe enough to occupy while waiting for a flight, it should be safe enough to sit and hold talks.

[1](#)3. (SBU) At a September 8 press conference in Kilinochi, LTTE political leader Thamilselvan rejected the airport proposal, saying it "does not hold good when what is contemplated is a serious political discussion". He further cited the Emergency Regulations enacted after the murder of Kadirgamar (Reftel B) as additional grounds for rejecting the airport locale. Later that same day, he announced the closure of all LTTE political offices in the GSL-controlled North and East in an interview with the pro-LTTE website "Puthinam". The LTTE had already closed most of their political offices in the eastern part of Sri Lanka following the July 10 murder of three senior political cadres in Trincomalee (Reftel A). The decision affects approximately 64 offices in the Jaffna and Vavuniya districts. (Note: The CFA guarantees the right of unarmed LTTE political cadres to do political work in GSL controlled areas. End Note) Sri Lankan Army sources report that some offices are closing but that the LTTE cadres remain in the area and have not withdrawn to LTTE controlled areas.

[1](#)4. (C) There has been some speculation that a purported meeting between members of the breakaway Karuna faction influenced the decision to close the offices. SLMM spokesperson Helen Olafsdottir confirmed that on May 29 while driving on the A-11 highway near Valachennai in Batticaloa district, SLMM personnel came upon a group of Karuna faction cadres. (Note: Although under government control, this part of Batticaloa district has little military presence and is heavy jungle. End Note) The Karuna faction were apparently prepared for this meeting as they had chairs and a photographer. Olafsdottir reported that the Karuna group seemed eager to meet the SLMM and engage them. Explaining the SLMM's decision to meet the renegade faction, Olafsdottir stated SLMM's position is that the GSL is responsible for areas under their control and that any armed parties operating in them should be disarmed in accordance with the CFA.

[1](#)5. (C) COMMENT: Although the meeting occurred three months ago, it appeared early this week on a pro-Karuna website and has since spread to pro-LTTE and English Sri Lankan language websites. Even though this is old news, the LTTE appears to have seized on it as a pretext to close the offices -- and to put increasing pressure on the faltering peace process. The LTTE has long held that the Karuna faction is aided and abetted by the SLA, targeting LTTE cadres at the military's behest. Learning of a meeting between the SLMM and the Karuna faction, however old, may have increased Tiger paranoia and further shaken their confidence in protecting their cadres. Since the right to operate political offices in GSL controlled territory was included in the CFA as a confidence building measure, the LTTE's message appears to be that, in the midst of ongoing tit-for-tat violence; it has no confidence in the GSL's ability to guarantee LTTE security.

